

the work he again expressed his anxiety to finish his series. There were to be only two more volumes, one on the Franco-German war of 1870, and the other, in which he then took most interest, a general summing-up of his "family history" by a scientific man, Dr. Pascal Eougon, whom he thought of marrying to some retrograde, bigoted woman who would destroy successively everything he wrote. And Zola sighed that he wished he could obtain permission to inspect the papers of Claude Bernard, on whose published writings he had reared, as will be remembered, his theory of *le roman experimental*. As for his projected "war" book, he did not think he could make much of a novel of it. His idea at that moment was to show some character "promenading" through the siege of Paris and the Commune.<sup>1</sup>

When, however, he took the subject in hand — spending the greater part of 1891 in collecting and classifying materials<sup>2</sup> — his views changed, and he decided rightly to make the battle of Sedan the keystone of the work. The expression, "*la débâcle*" occurs already in Alexis's "Notes d'un Ami," published in 1882, but at a later stage Zola thought of calling his book "La Guerre" ("War"). It is just possible that this was because a couple of French novels bearing the title of "La Débâcle" were in existence

already.<sup>3</sup>

However, French authors are much less punctilious than

<sup>1</sup> "Journal des aoncourt," Vol. VIII, p. 141.

<sup>2</sup> Towards the close of the summer he allowed himself a holiday and repaired to the Pyrenees with his wife. It was then (September) that he first visited Lourdes and was struck by the sight of the pilgrimages. It immediately occurred to him that they would supply a good subject for a book, and to study them more closely he returned to Lourdea in the summer of 1892,

\* The writer must admit that he has seen neither, but he has found one catalogued under the names of M. Claretie, the other under that of M. Camille Etievant. Both had appeared before 1885. It is of course possible that Zola had never heard of them.